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GUEST EDITORIAL

King's Chapel - A Christian Standard

ONE of the glories of our free association of Unitarian and Universalist churches is the fact that each local church is by tradition and polity a unique society of men and women who determine their own form of worship and religious commitment. This is a fact of potential greatness as well as potential weakness. It is congregational freedom carried to its far limits, which demands in turn congregational and ministerial responsibility such as no other ecclesiastical system demands. It is an inheritance deeply rooted in the Christian faith that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

But if one aspect of the life of our associated churches is their freedom, another, and equally important aspect, is their role as guardians and custodians of the religious life. It was for this purpose that they were founded, and it is for this purpose they continue to function. As the author of the "Letter to the Hebrews" writes: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."

On the fifteenth of June, King's Chapel in Boston entered upon its two hundred and seventy-fifth year as a Christian church. As the first Episcopal church in New England its origins were stormy and controversial due to the intolerant and rigid conformity demanded by the Puritan theocracy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was looked upon as the opening wedge in an attempt to bring Puritan Congregationalism under the rule of English bishops. None of these forecasts were without foundation, but at the same time none of these predictions came true. Episcopacy was never established in New England as it was in Maryland, Virginia, and some of the other Southern colonies. But for several generations it was the King's Chapel which alone stood out in Boston as a thorn in the side of the Elders and Magistrates of the "new Israel" built upon the *Bible* and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion.*

By the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century the theological climate had so far mellowed that a legalistic Calvinism was being displaced by a more genial "humanized liberalism," which emphasized the benevolence of God rather than His wrath, the mediatorial and saving work of Christ rather than his role as future Judge and Atoning Victim on the cross, and man was felt to be a co-operative agent in the scheme of salvation rather than a helpless and depraved creature unable to do right from wrong. This change in theology was reflected at Harvard College, the source from which most of eastern Massachusetts drew its ministers, and it found ready listeners and agreeable congregations in and around Boston. It was out of this liberal Christian background that Unitarianism emerged, and it was at King's Chapel in 1786 that the *Book of Common Prayer* was reformed omitting all references to the Trinity and the supreme deity of Christ, and substituting "doxologies from the pure word of God." Thus the oldest of the Episcopal churches in New England became the first Unitarian church in the United States.

For liberal Christian and Unitarian-Universalist churches today this event is more than a local Boston anniversary. It is a standard by which we can measure the enduring value of our liberal Christian tradition and its ability to withstand the severe judgement of time. King's Chapel, because of its Prayer Book liturgy and

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Our Christian Commitment

Charles M. Sherover

Sermon texts: Romans 12: 1-2, 9-18, 21; Galatians 5: 1, 13-14; I Corinthians 13.

I want to express to you my appreciation of the honor that has been bestowed upon me in affording me this privilege of meeting with you and sharing some thoughts with you. It does seem that the selection of this particular Sunday for a consideration of the faith and commitment of Unitarian Christianity is particularly appropriate—for this is Palm Sunday, the day we mark as the anniversary of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem just before his martyrdom. And—in view of the importance of Martin Luther's principle of the 'priesthood of all believers' to our Protestant Tradition, it further seems that the presentation of a Unitarian Christian faith, in this series, by a layman is symbolically fitting.

Religious faith is ultimately an individual matter and consequently my statement today is necessarily an individual statement.

It is a cliche of our tradition that Unitarianism arose as a protest against the deification of Jesus —as an assertion of his essential and ultimate humanity. I agree with this and do not wish to question it. But I do think that we are often a little too glib in reporting this historic assertion. Why, after all, was *Jesus* deified—elevated into the Godhead—regarded as divine? There were other great prophets, teachers and martyrs—Jeremiah, Isaiah, Socrates; yet history has left them as teachers and martyrs. Why not Christ?

The answer, I think, is not far to find. As we read of this life and the effect it has on men even far separated in time and space, I think that we can begin to understand. Here was an arresting personality; when people heard tell of him they felt inspired; when they heard his teaching they were ennobled.

The new religion about Christ was the religion of the poor and the oppressed of the ancient world. Christianity was the religion, not of the aristocracy, but of the slaves and of the conquered. As they felt the force of his personality, the moral insight of his teaching—through his disciples—something happened. A new sense of human dignity and human worth appeared; life was seen to have a meaning and a significance beyond the next beating or the next meal. A man was made to transcend his situation and to become whole—he saw, if dimly, that he had a tie beyond his ruler or his master to the divine.

In a cruel and superstitious age it was hard to believe that pure benevolence and ethical rectitude were truly human. In an era when even emperors were worshipped, it is no wonder that this Nazarene preacher, whose message meant so much to so many, was raised to the status of a hero, regarded as having super-human traits, as being somehow divine, as being divine, as being —in some inscrutable way—one with God.

If we find this difficult to understand we can think, in our own day, of many lives that have been changed, inspired or given new direction and meaning because of a vision of this man from Nazareth. In most dramatic terms, think of the many who refused to come to terms with modern tyranny, who faced a modern martyrdom under Hitler as Einstein has pointed out, and under Stalin—just because they held fast to a faith in the significance and message of Christ. Think of a Schweitzer who left the accolade of Europe for the jungles of Africa. Think of a Ghandi, who never called himself a Christian, but said, "The man to whom I owe most, the man to whom India owes most, is a man who never set foot in India, and that man was Christ."

As we look back from our present perspective upon the years when Christianity took form, we can see that something new and different was happening. With the advent of Jesus a new spirit came into the world—a humane spirit which saw each man as a child of the divine; this spirit, gradually imparting a new sense of human dignity, progressively brings one into relation and a state of concern with and for all men; it is a spirit of universal brotherhood, friendship, a spirit of a common concern and a common humanity. Cradled in a Bethlehem manger, it has come forth to conquer the hearts and move the minds of men.

Looking back, we can say that Jesus came, not to give us new commandments or ritualistic observances, but to warn that a man's religion cannot be contained in specified duties and ceremonies. Jesus came not only to teach men how to live, how to develop the fullest expression of

the divine gift of life—he came to teach men *to* live, to set the spirit of man free from bondage, fear, hatred, superstition, servility and ignorance. Jesus came to reveal the greatness of God through his creation. His "brightest revelation," [1] as Theodore Parker put it, "is this—of what is possible for all men." In his example of dedicated ethical commitment is shown the possibility of development for each one of us. Jesus came, as Channing suggested, "not to build churches nor to rear cathedrals . . . but to dedicate the human soul to God." [2] In his religion there is no formal creed, no unalterable form, no call to servility. The purpose of his religion "is not to exalt its teacher but to improve the disciple . . . to breathe into all men his spirit of universal love." [3]

Every teaching and example conjoin to this end of bringing forth the best, the spark of divinity, in each man—to its fullest fruition. He offers no occult transformation, no redemption for the unrepentant, no magic formula for avoiding the consequence of wrong-doing. As Channing, again, has urged: "Expect no good from Christ any farther than you are exalted by his character and teaching. Expect nothing from his cross unless a power comes from it strengthening you . . . with his own unconquerable love. . . . His reign and chief blessings are within you. . . . His noblest monument is a mind redeemed from iniquity . . . forming itself after [divine] perfection . . . great through its power to suffer for truth, lovely through its meek and gentle virtues." [4]

Regarding Jesus, then, not as a magic savior, but as the great exemplar, teacher, brother, friend, leader—Christianity becomes a very simple yet basic thing: "It is absolute pure morality, absolute pure religion; the love of man, the love of God acting without let or hindrance." [5] Its ground of faith is one assertion: God is. "The only form it demands is a divine life, doing the best thing in the best way from the highest motives." [5]

There are some among us who suggest that this is not peculiar to Christianity—that in some way all of the great religions have borne witness to the same truth, commended the same virtues. In the light of history, this sort of assertion appears to be groundless and to result from a rather superficial and careless consideration of religious history and religious thought.

Although Christianity was born of ancient Judaism, Christianity is not Judaism—not even a 'denationalized' and universalized Judaism. In the place of an ethic of justice it has asked an ethic of love, forebearance, forgiveness and compassion. In the place of ritualism and the weight of ceremonial law, it has called forth the free worship of the free dedicated spirit.

Christianity is not Islam: its God is patterned after the analogy of a loving father showing a parental interest in *all* of his children.

Christianity is not Zoroastrianism: it shares its dynamic and revolutionary concept of religion as a social leaven but its strategy is love and compassion instead of retribution.

Christianity is not Hinduism: its basic assertion is the ultimate importance of the individual human being.

Christianity is not Buddhism: it presupposes the importance of life and urges, not a monastic peace within the world, but an active transformation of the world.

Christianity is not Naturalistic Humanism: it has the philosophic wisdom to recognize that a valid ethic must be grounded in a metaphysic, in a view of the world. Naturalism has accepted the Christian ethic while refusing its justification; it has taken the fruit without the tree and as such is a philosophically rootless 'will to believe' or 'will to prefer' one type of action instead of another. The truer humanism of the Christian Tradition enjoins its love-ethic, not because it is merely nice or pleasant, but because it sees *each* man, in a real sense, as the image of God, as the incarnation of the divine, as a child of the Most High—and thereby due the basic respect one accords to one's ultimate object of worship

We can try to share the insights and appreciate the orientations of these alternative outlooks. But it is an elementary philosophical principle that one can only appreciate the virtues of another from one's own individual point of view. And it is precisely from the point of view of the values of Christian Ethics, whether we call ourselves humanists or theists, that we evaluate other religious codes.

Further—in order to truly understand the point of any specific ethical commandment we must first see the context of ideas in which it is offered and the function it is designed to serve. For example, if we read some of the classics of Confucius we come upon something quite similar to our own Golden Rule. On the basis of this, some impetuous souls promptly proclaim that Confucianism and Christianity are saying

the same thing. The Golden Rule, in Confucianism, is advocated as a means of achieving and conserving social stability; in Christianity, the Golden Rule is a means of social and individual regeneration. The whole point and purpose, and consequently the spirit in which they can be applied, are radically different. To pull them—each out of its own context—and pronounce the two religions the same because, on first glance, a few words look alike—is akin to confusing a chisel and a screwdriver: on first glance to a novice these two tools do look very much alike, but their functions are radically different: the chisel is designed to chip or split apart a wooden block—the screwdriver to drive a binding screw to force separate pieces together.

Each of the religions has a distinctive message, a different framework of values, a different outlook on life. Unitarian Christians do not deny value in other religions, but they do deny that they all preach the same virtues.

Historically, Christianity came forth out of Jerusalem and Athens. Culturally, it has brought into growing synthesis the two sources of western civilization: the moralism of ancient Judea and the rationalism of ancient Greece. In the face of eastern faiths, it has asserted that true religion can not be separated from the human reason to which it appeals.

In combining these two sources of historic inspiration into its own new and distinctive vision, it has done something more. It has seen that *all* human relationships are individual—whether they be between man-and-man or man-and-God. Because each of us is a distinct individual person with a situation ultimately his own, the individual's religion can not be fitted into predetermined molds without suppressing his identity. Each person must work out his own ethical way of communion with his fellows and with his God. Each persons's situation is individual and thereby different. The ethical demands upon him, as a unique personality, cannot be prescribed with a list of commandments. For Christianity is *not* satisfied with ritualistic observance. It demands the whole consecration of the whole man in one unmitigated commitment. It demands the complete dedication of his spirit to its permeating principle. It can *not* be contained in the cast of a theological system; it is *not* a codified list of do's and don't's, not a table of approved or condemned actions. It asks, not so much 'what things have you done *in* your life' as 'what have you done *with* your life.' And this is precisely why one particular individual is so important to the religion called Christian. Jesus came, as Channing suggested, "to give us a religion—but this is not all . . . he was sent to show forth his religion in himself . . . to be a living manifestation of his religion . . . (which) is more than a precept; it is example and action." [6]

Recognizing the ultimate importance of the individual human being in the sight of God as its underlying premise and principle, Christianity makes the fact of human personality so central that it has insisted that its full meaning can only be seen in the fully commited lives of fully dedicated individuals. Because its central value is the ultimate importance of the individual personality, it lays down no detailed road to salvation and spells out no program for the living of the individual's life. Especially under the reawakened spiritual freedom of Protestantism, of which Unitarianism is so much a part, it can ask for nothing more or less than the complete dedication of the individual person. It calls upon each man to live the good life as it commends itself to him. It gives him no commandment but to determine in his own inmost being how to actualize the law of love which his religion and his religion's God proclaim. "It teaches us to do good but leaves us to devise for ourselves the means by which we may best serve mankind. In a word, the whole religion of Christ may be summed up in the love of God and of mankind and it leaves the individual free to cherish and express this spirit by the method most accordant with his own mind",[7] and the possibilities which he sees in the situation in which he finds himself.

Unitarianism, then, seeks the purification of Christianity; it is a call to the essentially personal man-to-man and man-to-God relationship which it sees at the heart of Christian teaching. In common with all Protestants it opposes all intermediaries between God and man, between man and man. In the modern existentialist language of Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel, it asks each man to seek a consuming I-Thou relationship with every other man he encounters and with his God. In the more traditional language of Immanuel Kant, it enjoins each of us to regard each individual as an end in himself and not a means to some further end. In the language of our own William Ellery Channing,

it urges us to honor the divine image in each individual human being.

It has had the wisdom to perceive that this sort of relationship can not be prescribed. The dedication to such relationship must be made by each individual and creatively fulfilled by him in his own individual situations, in his own personal way. Once a man has dedicated himself to this kind of living, his own creative imagination will help him to see ways in which this spirit of universalized kinship and concern, for even the least among us, can be actualized in the myriad specific situations we each encounter.

Christianity, then, does not deny the individual; it affirms him, both as an individual personality and in communion with other people. It imprisons him with no ritualistic set of moralistic ceremonies but rather demands a complete dedication and commitment of the whole person in his own individuality. In such a commitment of the single self, it sees an act of the true worship to which it calls its adherents. This true worship is not ritualistic prayer or prescribed activity; it is not propitiatory flattery or servile praise; it does not consist in ritualistic observances or priestly ceremonial, not in emotional outbursts of superficial contrition.

The Christian commitment is based on a profound and calm conviction that God may be thought of after the analogy of a transcedent parent having a parental interest in the welfare and in the growth of each of his creatures. The Christian invitation urges us to accept this proffered divine companionship—and to take the idea of God, God as a Supreme Personality of infinite goodness—seriously. Taking the idea of God seriously, to make the living of the gift of life a testament of gratitude and fidelity to its source, to whose principles of righteousness we are supremely loyal and to whose essential goodness and creativeness we respond to the depth of our being.

The true worship of Christian commitment is not the abject servility of helpless beings, but the free dedication of free men, loyal to their divine inheritance, to bring forth, most fully, the divinity incarnate within themselves. It is a voluntary commitment to earnest cooperation in the essentially holy purpose of ongoing creation. It sees every value conflict as the opportunity for ethical creativity. It takes the idea of God seriously as having direct relevance to human living—in adherence to proven values—in creative acceptance of new values to meet new circumstances. It means living with a friendly air and a cheerful disposition on the part of men who, "as friends who share the Maker's plan (and) sons who know the Father's will," can sincerely say with a mature sense of mission and dignity and status, "Creation's Lord, we give thee thanks that this thy world is incomplete"; grateful for opportunities lying before them, they go forth in their whole lives to do the work appointed to them.

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[1] T. Parker, *Transient & Permanent in Christianity,* Beacon Press pamphlet, p. 25.

[2] W. E. Channing, "Christian Worship" in 1-vol *Works,* p. 425.

[3] W. E. Channing, "Evidence of Christianity," *Ibid.,* p. 208.

[4] W. E. Channing, "General Purpose of Christianity", *Ibid.,* p. 253.

[5] T. Parker, *op. cit.,* pp. 28-29.

[6] W. E. Channing, "The Perfect Life," ch. IX, *op. cit.,* p. 998.

[7] W. E. Channing, "Evidence of Christianity," *Ibid.,* pp. 208-09.

Be Thou my teacher O God, in the days of my youth.

I would learn of Thee the secret things which each must know if life is to be filled with its richest blessing.

To Thee the great souls of the ages have turned. Thou hast whispered to them the answer to their questions and they have been springs of water for the thirsty world.

My lessons shall be the duties and obligations of life, its joys and its sorrows, its successes and its failures.

Thou hast given to me youth, and hope, and a great creative faith. Thou hast taught me that today is better than yesterday. I would that my life might make tomorrow better than today.

Be Thou my teacher O God, my companion and friend.

So shalt Thou create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Amen.

—Rev. Walter Reid Hunt, D.D.

Freedom to Believe

Philip M. Larson, Jr.

Unitarians have generally concurred that they are free to disbelieve. We are free to refute any past dogma or creed, free to enter avidly into the arena of biblical criticism, free to deny, to doubt, to question and to reject. Such freedom is good, proper and necessary in a liberal faith. The freedom to *dis*believe, however, is a negative tact. The freedom to believe is a positive one, and thus more to be desired by a religious body.

Great religion is largely concerned with the beliefs of its leaders. The followers of Moses, Buddha, LaoTze, Mohammed, and Jesus were concerned not about what these men disbelieved, but about their beliefs. Religion generally has concerned itself not with negation but with affirmation. No religion in history has ever become a popular religion on the basis of its disbelief. Such a negative approach to religion or to life itself is both illogical and psychologically unsound.

It is true that when a man stands FOR something, he stands against something else. The man who stands for truth is opposed to falsehood. Should he emphasize his opposition to falsehood or should he give all his strength and energy to truth? If a man stands for love in human relations, he stands against hatred. Can he logically fight hatred with hate? No, he cannot, for if he truly believes in love he will and must be loving in the face of hate. To stand FOR truth and love will always prove to be more effective, than to stand against falsehood and hatred. The POSITIVE approach in human relations is always more successful than the negative. To believe one thing usually means that we oppose another. The contrary, however, is not true. Namely, that because we stand AGAINST something we must necessarily believe something. At least in many instances we are unable to verbalize this contrary position. Let us look at this more closely in relation to a group of Unitarians having a religious discussion. The first speaker, brave soul that he is, asserts a definite belief, "I believe in God." Immediately he is set upon by his fellow Unitarians who take to negative criticism like bees to honey. The semantic jargon and confusion that follows we have all experienced. Finally in desperation our first speaker asks his primary critic, "What do you believe?" After the usual stammering the answer will come back, "I don't know." It is tragic that the man who feels that he does have a belief is often soundly criticized for being so naive as to think that any religious affirmation is possible at all. The agnostics usually emerge quite smugly from such discussion, happy to have so confused the issue with semantics that all the participants are left hanging in the air. Our contageous negativism stifles our sensitivity. Our over intellectualization of all religious concepts leaves us sterile. Too few Unitarians will grant a fellow traveler the rights to assert a belief on the basis of his experience and "feeling." For in the final analysis a man either "feels" the existence of God or he doesn't. That another person should deny our believer this privilege is a gross violation of freedom.

The only affirmation that has seemed agreeable to all of us is the one which reads, "We avow our faith in individual freedom of belief." Some liberals would have such a statement rewritten to assert, "We avow our faith in our individual freedom to *dis*believe." Such negativism is altogether too common among us.

In the history of our denomination it is good to note that AFFIRMATIONS have been set forth. These affirmations are found in the *Hymns of the Spirit*. We can recall the article on Unitarianism set forth by one of us in LOOK magazine not long ago. A chosen delegate spoke for us. His words were well chosen, yet, a hew and cry went up from multitudes. Their freedom was violated. I imagine that such critics would rather that no Unitarian ever said anything, in front of anyone at anytime. Such critics show little reticence to speak out about their disbeliefs so that the world looks upon many Unitarians as "people who don't believe anything."

Are we not free to believe? Ours is a free church. Each of us is free to believe, and to believe before all the world to see. Are we only free to keep any beliefs we have to ourselves, in the shelter of our homes? This is not freedom! Are we so afraid to violate another Unitarian's freedom by speaking, that we never speak at all?

It is my contention that the most valuable freedom in the liberal church is the freedom TO believe, and in our freedom to speak of these beliefs before all men.

Proposal for a New Name

Ronald M. Mazur

The time is now appropriate for a consideration of a change in names for the Unitarian Christian Fellowship and for *The Unitarian Christian* magazine. It is important, in view of the new character of our continental Association of Unitarian and Universalist churches, that our Fellowship and magazine have an all-embracing title of identity which will succinctly convey our purpose for being. To that end, I propose for acceptance by our members and readers the name, "The Liberal Christian Fellowship of Unitarians, Universalists and Others." For popular usage the title would be simply, "The Liberal Christian Fellowship," and the title of our magazine would be, *The Liberal Christian.*

This proposed name is not a sectarian innovation. Indeed, it is an essential concept within our tradition as well as an established part of our heritage. At three different times in our history, three different periodicals were entitled, "The Liberal Christian." Each of them was to be a comprehensive organ for the promotion of liberal Christian thought, and each of them established a bond of communication and a channel for dialogue between Unitarians, Universalists, and others. There were, for example, *The Liberal Christian,* a fortnightly magazine published in Brooklyn, Conn., in 1823; *The Liberal Christian,* a monthly journal published in Montreal, Canada, in 1854; and *The Liberal Christian,* a weekly newspaper published in New York, N.Y., in 1866. The latter, successor to *The Christian Inquirer,* was edited by the prime founder of organized American Unitarianism, Dr. Henry W. Bellows. Each of these periodicals served their times well and advanced the cause of liberal Christianity to which Unitarianism and Universalism were dedicated.

It is now time for a new Liberal Christian periodical to carry on. We of this Fellowship are not "liberal religionists"—we are liberal Christians—and what Dr. Bellows proclaimed remains relevant for us at this juncture of our associational history. Below, are some of his words from the first issue of The Liberal Christian, December 22, 1866. Do they speak to you?

The Liberal Christian

"Aiming to promote the cause of truth and righteousness, and build up the kingdom of God in the hearts of men and in the world, we shall endeavor to set forth in the ablest, clearest, and most interesting way, the great ideas and principles of the Christian religion, and apply them to the various relations and experiences of life, the exigencies and movements of society and the great questions of the nation and the age. As disciples of Christ we shall endeavor to unfold his thought, catch and diffuse his spirit, and so represent his life, character, divine mission, and redemptive and reconstructive work in the world that our readers shall be brought into closer sympathy and communion with his spirit and truth, feel the influence of his healing and renewing touch on their souls, and become more faithful followers of him in all humane offices and spiritual walks. We want for ourselves and we believe the world wants, immensely more than any patent panacea or mechanical millenium, more of the faith, the spirit, the moral consecration and heroism, and the perfect love of God and of men, which were so sublimely manifested in the life and character of Christ; and believing this, we shall say this according to the best of our ability.

The *Liberal Christian* will represent and set forth the central and fundamental ideas, principles, spirit, tendency and aim of our many-sided and variously-shaded denomination. . . . But we shall not restrict ourselves to any single phase of denominational life, nor identify ourselves with any party or wing; aiming at the highest catholicity of thought and spirit, we shall welcome contributions which set forth views differing from our own. Nor shall we confine ourselves to the Unitarian body, but shall keep the most sympathetic watch upon and record of the movements of other liberal bodies. The *Liberal Christian* will rejoicingly recognize all Liberal Christians of whatever name, or no name, as brethren and allies; and do what it can to promote acquaintance, fellowship and cooperation among the various branches of the Liberal brotherhood. In the Universalist body, in particular, we feel the deepest interest, and expect contributions from its leading men. . .

. . . So much for our aims and plans. They will not be realized all at once, but will be kept steadily in view."

Book Reviews

RELIGION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, *the History of a Spiritual Triumph,* by Robert H. Pfeiffer. Edited by Charles Conrad Forman (N.Y.: Harper and Brothers, 1961).

The Editor of "The Unitarian Christian" has brought to completion an important work by the late Robert H. Pfeiffer, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and other Oriental Languages at Harvard, a member of the faculty of the Harvard Divinity School, and Curator of the Semitic Museum. An editor who is also a contributor to a posthumous book has the double duty faithfully to complete an unfinished task, and also to decide how far he should say the last word, in the light of rapidly advancing studies, for a writer silenced by the hand of death. Charles Forman tells in the Preface to *Religion in the Old Testament,* that the work was completed to the year 621 B.C. (158 pages out of a total of 276), and that in this section he made as few alterations as possible, "utilizing Pfeiffer's marginal notes and later corrections. Had he been able to do this he would, undoubtedly, have made more extensive revisions than I was willing to undertake." For the final chapters (vi-ix) the Editor had to depend on material Pfeiffer left, specially on the lecture notes of his course on the Religion of Israel. It can be said that the work is a unity, carried through with striking success.

Religion in the Old Testament brings to the reader fruits of the indefatigable industry of a great scholar. It also fills out the general scheme of his two standard works in the field of Old Testament and kindred studies. Pfeiffer's *Introduction to the Old Testament,* (revised ed. 1948) still the valued handbook of all students and teachers in that field, gives an analysis and literary estimate of each of the books of the Old Testament. In his *History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the Apocrypha* (1949) he devotes Part I to an exposition of 'Judaism from 200 B.C. to A.D. 200', thereby also covering the background of the New Testament, before taking up, one by one, the books of the Apocrypha. The new work was evidently set to cover Israelite religion from the beginning up to 200 B.C. The Editor has been alert to the fact that two books of the Old Testament flow over into the following century. In his "Epilogue" (pp. 218-224) he treats of Daniel and Ecclesiastes, still following the main lines of Pfeiffer's *Introduction to the Old Testament,* but, particularly in his treatment of the Wisdom literature, giving the reader the advantage of his own research and publications.

Robert Pfeiffer always loved to emphasize the practical application of any principle he worked upon. He is free here to cull his illustrations at will from whatever book or period of culture can supply them. In *Religion in the Old Testament* he traces the emergence of the spiritual principles of a particular people into media of sufficient universality to form the basic elements in Judaism and Christianity. He does not credit the earliest writers with philosophic interests. It is characteristic of them, and of him, that he grasps their emphasis upon doing, upon activity rather than reflection:

> An ancient Israelite worshipped the God of his people, but a Jew worshipped the sole God in existence; an Israelite was a member of a nation, a Jew a member of a religious congregation.

The book is full of interest at whatever page the reader may lay it open. The early ethics of Israel, for instance, were based on customs widespread in the ancient Near East:

> Since custom was at times capricious rather than right, in cases of conflict of duty a choice might be made which we would consider wrong, but which would nevertheless be in harmony with traditional custom . . . as when Abraham allowed Sarah to decide the fate of Hagar (Gen. 16:6), when the angel ordered Hagar to return and submit to Sarah's cruel treatment (16:9), and when Abraham drove Hagar out to die in the desert with her son Ishmael (21:14).

He could write with this assurance because of his extensive acquaintance with the tablets from Nuzi, a city in northeastern Mesopotamia of the 15th and 14th centuries B.C. These bear intimately upon patriarchal ways of life, and shed light upon the veracity of the biblical narratives. If, for instance, in Nuzi a wife had no children, she was supposed to present her husband with a handmaid. If later she tired of the girl, she might not send her away without the consent of the husband. That is why—although the Bible

does not give the reason—Sarah seeks Abraham's permission to dispense with Hagar.

Religion in the Old Testament is a vital and serious book. Pfeiffer's abundant humor was always restrained in his writing. Among his students in the lecture room it was different. Just once, at a luncheon meeting of Alumni and Friends of the American Schools of Oriental Research of Jerusalem and Baghdad, the reviewer had occasion to invite him to a characteristic display of wit. Members were celebrating the progress of excavations in stony Palestine, and praising Professor Millar Burrows' book, *What Mean These Stones?* Robert Pfeiffer arose, declaring that it was far from him to take such a line. Members of the Jerusalem School talked of nothing but 'stones', as if all the secrets of the past came out of them. But in Mesopotamia there were no 'stones', everything was MUD. So he was impelled to sing the praise of MUD and all that records on clay meant for understanding the human story.

So with frequent reference to stone and clay, the transition from 'a religion based on custom' to one 'revealed by God through his prophets and recorded in inspired scripture' is traced in his latest book. In place of the usual categories, pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic, Pfeiffer advocates a twofold division, before and after 621 B.C.' The book is arranged accordingly. The change from Israelite religion to Judaism does not come suddenly and conclusively; but 621 B.C. was the year in which the Code of Deuteronomy was discovered in the temple at Jerusalem and promulgated by king Josiah. From then on Judaism appears, 'Incipient', 'Plastic', and lastly 'Normative'. These are the Editor's headings for the table of Contents.

Pfeiffer takes Amos as the great figure of the period before 621 B.C. In the words of this prophet the ethical and social aspects of Israelite religion take recognizable shape. Regarding the second period, Pfeiffer holds that the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 were written earlier than the version in Exodus 20, for the writer of the latter chapter, in his reference to the sabbath, shows his knowledge of Genesis 1-2: 4a. Pfeiffer holds to his theory that the Eden story in the book of Genesis was unknown to the early Israelites, and that, whether it was of Edomite or Israelite origin, its deep pessimism has influenced the book of Job.

More definitely than in his *Introduction to the Old Testament* he dates publication of the book of Job at about 600 B.C. (p. 115). He sees it as derived from Edomite Wisdom, and as giving the first description of the universe as built up by God, its Creator, and as enunciating the first expression of universal monotheism in the Bible. He claims that the book has left its stamp upon the doxologies added to the books of Amos and Jeremiah, upon the Second Isaiah (40-55), and the writer of the first chapter of Genesis.

Religion in the Old Testament is an objective book. It gives the picture of the development of biblical religion free from the tendency of the present-day theologian to endow earlier events with later coloration. Its value is enhanced by provision of a Selected Bibliography, an Index of Authors, lists of passages quoted from Old Testament and Apocryphal sources, from Rabbinical and Classical writings, and an Index of Subjects. A Bibliography of the Writings of Robert Pfeiffer, compiled by his wife, Matilda V. Pfeiffer (pp. 233-256), reveals the scope of his industry and the breadth of his interests. It will be welcomed by all his friends and admirers and by all who may have occasion to consult his views in the course of their own studies.

Margaret B. Crook

THREE PROPHETS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERALISM: CHANNING, EMERSON PARKER. Introduced by Conrad Wright. Beacon Paper Back LR 12. Beacon Press, Boston, 1961. 152 pages. $1.25.

Unitarianism is an historical religion, which means that an understanding of its present position (and perplexities) and future developments depends in great measure on an understanding of its past and origins. Unlike Mormonism and Christian Science, two uniquely modern American religions, Unitarianism did not spring full blown from the divinely inspired mind of a nineteenth century prophet or founder, but rather percolated into history out of the grounds of a defunct and purblind Calvinism, which had lost its theological tenability on the "enlightened" clergy and laity of sea-board Massachusetts. For this reason Unitarianism in America was never a European transplant, as were the Roman Catholic and great host of Protestant bodies. It grew up here as a *reaction* within the existing New England order of Congregational churches, well settled and socially stable.

Because of its New England Congregational origin (King's Chapel excepted), modern Unitarianism inherited certain characteristics of polity and position which have clung to it through a century and a half of its identifiable existence. Without benefit of Constitution, Canon Law, Creed, Confession or Catechism, which would have acted as authorities within the movement, American Unitarianism like British Common Law has been characterized by several "classical" milestones which have served as both norms and guide-lines of theological positions achieved and seedbeds of future growth. "Channing's Baltimore Sermon, Emerson's Divinity School Address, and Parker's South Boston Sermon have long been accepted as the three great classic utterances of American Unitarianism." In this paperback Dr. C. Conrad Wright of the Harvard Divinity School has brought together these sermons, and prefaced them with a brilliantly lucid introduction of forty-six pages, which carefully re-creates the atmosphere of their composition, and the reaction to their delivery.

It is vitally important today, when Unitarianism is experiencing continental expansion and the novelties of Universalist merger, that an increased knowledge of our theological heritage be broadly shared by clergy and laity alike. Dr. Wright has succinctly analyzed the contents of these addresses, and explained their enduring significance for modern Unitarian-Universalists.

HARRY M. STOKES

From the President's Desk

Paul H. Chapman

Last April the Executive Commtitee of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship was presented with a proposal to change the name of the Fellowship so that Universalists and others who consider themselves Liberal Christians but not necessarily Unitarians, might feel more like taking an active part in our work. The proposal to change the name of the Fellowship and of our magazine and of broadening the purposes of the U.C.F. seemed very logical. Why not rename our movement The Liberal Christian Fellowship? Christians from various European countries who consider themselves Liberal Christians have been attending and taking part in the Congresses of the International Association of Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom for many years. These fine workers in the IARF are not Unitarians or Universalists but are distinctly Liberal Christians.

When we took a straw vote at our May Supper in Boston quite a number of objections to the word liberal were raised. I have since received a letter, including a contribution to the Unitarian Christian Fellowship but urging that we do not substitute the word Liberal for Unitarian. And this comes from a leading layman of a Universalist Church.

The Webster's dictionary I have on my desk says that "liberal" is a word used "befitting a man of free birth, not restricted, as a liberal manner, or, a liberal education." In interpretation a liberal is "not confined or restricted to the literal sense, but free; as, a liberal translation." Or again a liberal is "free from restraint, unchecked." Intellectually a liberal is not "narrow contracted in mind, but broad-minded." "He is not bound by orthodox tenets or established forms in political or religious philosophy, independent in opinion not conservative." Or again he is one who is "liberal in thought or principles."

The root of the word "liber" means free. And there are those among us who consider themselves "Free Christians." These are among the reasons why I personally voted for the word "liberal."

A letter from a colleague states, "I have just finished reading the current edition of the Proceedings of the Unitarian Historical Society. The article by Frank Walker on Henry W. Bellows reinforced in my mind the appropriateness of "The Liberal Christian" as a new name for our magazine. I am by no means fixated on this title —several others are possible—but I urge your serious consideration of it again."

Shall we think this proposal through carefully? If you have objections to the word "liberal" will you spell them out for us? Whether you are for or against please send your opinions before the summer is over to Mr. Harry Stokes, 89 Marlborough St., Boston, Mass. Mr. Stokes is assisting the editor during the summer.

(continued from page 2)

inherited forms of ceremony, stands like a yardstick against which more recent liberal Christian expressions can be assessed. It points to the fact that faith and freedom are compatible when they are jointly based upon an intelligent religious commitment arising out of personal and responsible choice. It embodies in its liturgy a beauty and depth which is not at variance with the simplicity of Christian truth, nor stultifying to the free growth of personal spiritual insight. Unlike so many descendent churches of Puritan lineage, King's Chapel has been able to worship God "in the beauty of holiness" without recourse to that aesthetic iconoclasm which confuses religious purity with bare and empty halls. Negative reductionism, whether of theology, belief, or worship, has no place in a church which is fully free to worship God "in spirit and in truth."

Finally, King's Chapel may be said to be a yardstick of contemporary liberal religion in the measure of its trusteeship of the Christian Revelation. It has preserved, as the Universal Christian Church must always and everywhere preserve, that final allegiance to the worship and work of God which Christians find revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus. Only when that life and ministry are seen as truly significant in man's total religious understanding can the bread and wine of Holy Communion be administered as the sacramental bond between the believer and the sustaining Source of that faith. For in Jesus as the Christ, as the bearer of God's presence among men, the liberal Christian is able to discern the meaning and value of human existence as he himself is forced to struggle with the daily and ultimate issues of life. This disclosure ("apocalypsis", a revelation, says the Greek *New Testament*) is not however purely personal and individualistic, because it draws one into fellowship with others, whom as a body comprise the Universal Christian Church.

This understanding of Jesus as the Christ (the One in whom we encounter the universal God under the conditions of history) is therefore a "rationale" for living which unites in historical understanding the transcendence and mystery of God and His loving presence and concern within the fabric of human existence. It is a "word from the Lord" which becomes in Christian experience "the Word." As the Fourth Evangelist wrote: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is because King's Chapel, as the first of our Unitarian churches, has continued to know this truth in its liturgy, and preached this truth in its pulpit, and within its walls has broken the bread which symbolizes it, that all Unitarian Universalist Christians rejoice and share in its two-hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary.

H. M. S.

Introducing Our Contributors

Mr. Charles M. Sherover, Unitarian layman, delivered "Our Christian Commitment" as a Palm Sunday sermon at the Unitarian Church of Staten Island, New York on April 10, 1960. This is his first appearance in the pages of *The Unitarian Christian.*

Rev. Philip M. Larson, Jr. is a graduate of St. Lawrence University, where he received his B.D. in 1953. He is minister of the First Congregational Society (Unitarian) of Chelmsford and the First Parish Church of Tynsboro in Massachusetts.

Rev. Ronald M. Mazur, a graduate of Boston University and the Harvard Divinity School, is minister of the First Parish Church (Unitarian) of Stowe, Massachusetts. Mr. Mazur is a member of the Editorial Board of *The Unitarian Christian,* and has contributed frequently to its pages.

Mr. Harry M. Stokes, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the Harvard Divinity School, is the Lay Reader and Director of Religious Education in King's Chapel, Boston. He is a Director at Large of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship, and the guest editor of this issue of *The Unitarian Christian.*